

HANNA



When one thinks of movie or television animation, two production companies immediately spring to mind. One of course is Disney, the other is Hanna-Barbera, one of the most successful film production houses in the world. William Hanna and Joseph Barbera have been producing cartoons for both the big and small screen for 50 years.

The Hanna-Barbera Studio has created some of the most memorable cartoon characters in the history of animation: Tom and Jerry, The Flintstones, The Jetsons, Top Cat, Huckleberry Hound, Yogi Bear and Scooby Doo, to name but a few. Their latest venture is the first feature length movie of their classic TV series *The Jetsons*, which is being released on video this month. Paul Fischer caught up with these two prolific film makers and chatted with them about the changing face of animation and *The Jetsons* on the big screen.

Paul Fischer: When you did your first TV series, *The Flintstones*, was TV animation a respected art form at that time?

Joseph Barbera: TV animation as such had been established by then, but prime-time TV with cartoons was not. But the type of animation and the way the story etc. was approached had been done before, it's just that *The Flintstones* were new to TV, and the quality of the animation and the story was a departure from regular cartoons.

P.F: How did the networks react to *The Flintstones* concept when the idea was first pitched to them?

J.B: Well, the concept was new as far as animation goes and there was no prime-time cartoon on the air. So our sales representative came in and suggested we try it, which we did. We experimented with a lot of concepts and finally when we hit upon the caveman idea and began having fun with it, we took it to the networks and got positive reactions from everybody. Even though they loved it, they were so nervous about the fact that it was such a new medium and idea, they hesitated in putting their money into it. It was that way until the very last day of eight weeks that I had spent in New York pitching the idea, when on a Friday morning, three ABC executives came in and bought the show in 15 minutes. And that was after eight strenuous weeks of trying to sell it. Now it was up to us to produce it and it was a big job, because we were going from shorts to half-hour prime-time. But it ultimately worked.

P.F: Why has it stood the test of time?

J.B: It's an amazing thing. The stories are good as I mentioned. But also they're genuinely funny and they deal with everyday situations that people are confronted with all the time.

P.F: How did you hit upon the idea of *The Jetsons* TV series?

William Hanna: That was easy. We had done so well with *The Flintstones* back in the stone-age, we thought; why not try a similar situation in the future, and we think it worked very well.

P.F: Being the early sixties, was it difficult to create the inventions used in the series?

W. H: With a little imagination, those ideas came very fast and there were a lot of them that are seen today. Basically, you took all the essentials of everyday life like a toaster and ask yourself: how would you do it 100 years from now? How would you go from one place to another? Would you fly? So we created those vehicles. Where do they live? So one of the gimmicks was that the apartments were on hydraulics and they rose above the clouds, which we need here desperately.

P.F: Does it surprise you that much of the future you so cleverly envisaged in the early sixties has virtually become a reality in the nineties?

W.H: No, because it was easy to think of the ideas; we didn't have to do any of the engineering; just the drawing.

P.F: How has the technology of animation changed?

W.H: Some of it has gone into computers, which I handle. The computer has done certain things in animation, such as the moving space vehicles or in some of the movement of the asteroids. Even as late as yesterday, I was up in San Francisco looking at the animation being done on characters created by the computer. However, I don't think we'll replace the finer aspects of character by computer; there's still nothing like a well done animated feature. For example, in something such as *The Jetsons* feature I don't think they will be able to duplicate some of the fine character action that was in that picture with a computer. I feel that the animator as an artist is here for a long time yet.

P.F: So why after 30 years did you want to make a feature film of *The Jetsons*?

J.B: They asked for it. Another reason we agreed was that those first 26 *Jetsons* we had made 30 years ago were still running today with people still looking at them and enjoying them. If it had endured for that long, to me it

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seemed like a feature would be a good thing.
P.F: Was it hard to get into the swing of making a feature?

W.H: No, because about 2 years before, Joe and I had made ten 2-hour features for television, and of course we had made several features before that.

P.F: Was it always your intention, as much as possible, to retain the original cast?

J.B: Yes, although we lost George Hanlon (who played George Jetson) just after completing his last session.

P.F: Why was Tiffany cast as George's daughter?

J.B: Well that was a Universal decision. Universal was financing the picture and they had a new star, so they felt they would try and launch her with this picture. They put a little weight on it, so what are you going to do?

P.F: Are you happy with the result?

J.B: Fair, just fair.

P.F: Who would you have cast had you been given a choice?

J.B: If it had been us, I think we would have gone with the original Judy Jetson, who also sings and would have been fine in the part. But Tiffany did a nice job; she sang alright and was very nice to work with. However, her manager and some of the recordings weren't right and it actually got away from us to a degree, but nevertheless the whole thing worked out.

P.F: Is it expensive these days to make a feature length cartoon?

W.H: A good cartoon feature today is going to cost you a minimum of \$12 million, and some are even going up into the twenties.

P.F: Financially then, how has *Jetsons: The Movie* worked for you?

W.H: So far it has done very well. It grossed a lot of money domestically as well as in such foreign territories as Australia. I think the cassette sales here put it up in the top ten for about fourteen weeks.

P.F: Are you happy with the film?

J.B: Yes I am. I think it's a good film and it will continue to be released and re-released and do very well. *The Jetsons* are still very popular.

W.H: My only concern was that we had a limited budget, and we could have done a lot better with more money, but we did as well as we could.

P.F: So for a new generation of kids who may never have heard of *The Jetsons*, why would you recommend this film?

J.B: Primarily, we had a very simple story line which we all know: basically a family is asked to move to another job which happens every day. Secondly, we have the trauma of the family being upset at having to leave their friends, which happens whenever families have to do that. Thirdly, they go to the new job where they have to make friends with new people (in this case, aliens); and finally, we have an environmental problem - they didn't realise that they were disturbing a bunch of innocent little creatures that never bothered them one way or another. So it was all a very solid, basic idea that we tried to resolve.

P.F: Has your work been rediscovered as a result of home video?

W.H: Oh definitely. I know that our video sales have been tremendous and successful. The people who run that department are highly innovative in the way they present the material and are doing an outstanding job.

J.B: The bottom line as far as video is concerned, is that on my recent visit to the Las Vegas software convention, people were coming up to our booth and saying: I was raised on your cartoons, and now I can enjoy them all over again with our kids.

P.F: Do you cringe when you see the first TV episodes of shows such as *The Flintstones* and *The Jetsons*?

J.B: Not too much. When we did those, there was nobody else working, and we launched a new medium, a novel method of animation and a new style. Within a short while everybody was back working with us and we managed to hire back our entire studio which had been laid off.

P.F: The two of you have been working together now for 50 years yet you haven't filed for divorce. How do you account for that?

W.H: We both operate in different areas and we confer with each other on each other's area. I am so involved with what I'm doing, I don't have time to look back and Joe's in about the same boat. We have remained good friends and have worked closely together, but we've both operated in different directions.

J.B: But it's all towards a common end. And also, all the money goes to me.

Jetsons: The Movie is being released this month on video through CIC Video.

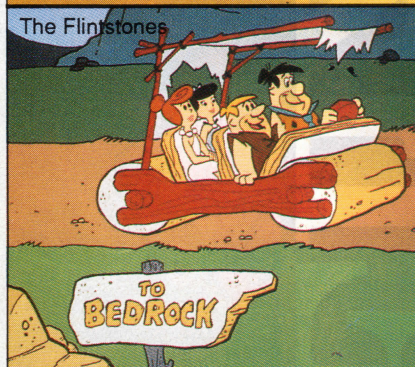
The original TV episodes of both *The Flintstones* and *The Jetsons* are currently available on video through CIC Video.



Jetsons: The Movie



Jetsons: The Movie



The Flintstones